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One of Four

Story Geoff Meyer images Massimo Zanzani

Monster Energy Yamaha rider and 2015 MXGP champion Romain Febvre is one of the riders known as “The Big Four”. Along with defending MXGP and MX2 champions Tim Gajser and Jeffrey Herlings, plus the eight-time world champion Antonio Cairoli he went into this year’s series as one of the big favourites to take home the title.

While 2016 might not have been as special as his 2015 title run, he was in contention for the title, and very close in the points race with Tim Gajser, until his accident at Matterley Basin when he picked up a massive concussion.

He also rode well in the MXoN, scoring 1-4 results and showing he was back to his best. The Frenchman knows that this year is going to be tough, and he also realizes that consistency will win the MXGP championship.

Now with a solid start to the season, we caught up with Romain, who was kind enough to take our call and do this interview.

Motocross Illustrated: How did you feel your pre-season preparation was?

Febvre: It has been good preparation. We have been a month in Sardinia, like every year. Everything is fine. I am fit and ready to race. We also did the Italian championship at the beginning of the season. It wasn't the best race for sure, because I crashed in the first round. Let's say, I had some racing, but it wasn't my best form. It was good to see all the riders there and to see if anyone had improved. I am feeling better now than I felt during the Italian championship. I look forward to getting to Qatar.

Motocross Illustrated: How did you feel in Qatar?

Febvre: I think third was my place in Qatar. Tony and Gajser were really fast and I couldn't fight with them on the

Friday. It was a shame in the first moto because I made two mistakes and lost the chance for third place on the podium. I was not feeling so sharp on the track or the bike…so I'm happy to take that third in the second race.

Motocross Illustrated: How did you feel about your Indonesian round?

Febvre: I had some pain on my shoulder but I was still riding good, so to not finish because I was stuck, it's even worse. I didn't do the sighting lap to save the bike, so when I pulled the holeshot and didn't jump the first jump many guys passed me, but I found my rhythm pretty fast, I just got stuck.

Motocross Illustrated: Everyone is talking about yourself, Jeffrey and Tim, but in the pre-season, it was all the older riders who won. Then Antonio and Simpson win the first two rounds. Does that surprise you?

Febvre: No, it doesn't surprise me so much. I was feeling good in the first heat in Italy, I didn't have a great result. I saw Antonio, training in Sardinia, because he was also there and for sure he was fast, like always. He won I think everything, but he is fast and he is ready. It isn't about just about five races, this season is a lot of races, and I knew already he would be good. Jeffrey also when he is fit, he will be good and Tim also. I think we need to be consistent all season and try not to make any mistakes and score as many points as

possible, just stay on the bike.

Motocross Illustrated: If you walk away from Qatar with just a top five, is that ok?

Febvre: Yes, for sure, that is fine. I hope I will be in the top five, or on the podium. Winning is special and I hope so, but there is more pressure than usual and if I get a podium it will be really good, but the objective is to get a top five.

Motocross Illustrated: I did some statistics for my website and I saw there are 21 guys from MXGP, who have won a GP and a total of 266 GPs. Those are amazing statistics.

Febvre: Yes, this year is going to be a tough one. Like always now, but the best guys from MX2 are now in MXGP and its going to be interesting what guys like Jeffrey and Anstie can do. We will see, but like I said, at this moment everyone is fit and ready to race and no injured riders. Usually in the pre-season riders are injured, like Desalle and maybe some more.

Motocross Illustrated: The first two rounds, the Indonesian track was very interesting, but very difficult and Qatar we have that amazing facility, a night race and Qatar with its great hotels and weather. Did you get excited for the experience?

Febvre: Yes, for sure. I always like Qatar, from the very first time we went there. Like you said the weather is good and its perfect for riding, not too hot during the day and not too cold at night. We always just go for four days, because there isn't a lot to do there, but they do have nice hotels. I really like the facility, they have everything staying in the garage of the MotoGP. I like riding in the night. Indonesia, I have never been there, but some people told me it's going to be more humid than Thailand, so that was going to be tough. But it's like that for everyone, so that is ok.

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Out of the Gate!!!!

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

Eight times world motocross champion, Antonio Cairoli continues to show that his career is long but over. The Italian legend, from the Red Bull KTM Factory team put together a brilliant performance to go 1-1 at the Losail circuit in Qatar. He then backed it up with a solid points haul in the mud in Indonesia, to go into the third round in Argentina with the red-plate. We caught up with the red plate owner about his two weekend.

Motocross Illustrated: How do you feel about your weekend in Indonesia?

Cairoli: Championship wise it was good. The track was a nice track, just the weather conditions were bad all week. At least we could ride a moto and we got a fourth place, so the championship is okay. I think it's great that my team-mate made the podium, he works hard with me. I didn't have a great start and I lost some positions, because I didn't want to get stuck somewhere. I was in 14th or 13th, but I managed to ride safely and some crashed, and some got stuck in the mud.

Motocross Illustrated: If you looked at the top ten, or top 12, a lot of the older guys in there, Leok, Goncalves, Van Horebeek. Those guys of guys. That isn't a surprise is it?

Cairoli: It's important to have good experience in these type of races. I am really happy to have a lot of experience in these type of mud races, and I started carefully and I knew that this track could catch you out quickly. We got a good fourth place and we know Shaun is good in these conditions and he riders in these conditions all the time. Also Glenn and Clement, I was happy to see them on the podium. I am happy to be battling with Clement for the championship, but anything can happen.

Motocross Illustrated: I noticed on one occasion you were about to go through the mud and somebody got stuff in front of you, and you got wide-ways and nearly got caught. Did that happen very often?

Cairoli: You know your heart beat goes up and down and you could get stuck anywhere, any time and it was tricky. You need to do enduro style and wait until some riders go past and see what they did, but it was also fun.

Motocross Illustrated: Did you have a special line through the mud?

Cairoli: I didn't have a special line, I just watched the others in front of me and see where people pass, but I am light and I have a strong bike, so I could save it sometimes, while others were more unlucky than me.

Motocross Illustrated: Can you tell me what happened between the riders meeting with FIM, and when that final moto was cancelled?

Cairoli: You know, the jury wasn't ready on a decision, so we didn't know what was going on, so we got dressed and the race direction did a good job, because it wasn't an easy decision to make, but I think it was the right

decision.

Motocross Illustrated: I know there wasn't a lot to do on the island, but the people on this island are so friendly, and I know you like these types of experiences.

Cairoli: Actually, it felt like a home Grand Prix. So many fans over here in Indonesia, and I am so glad we come to this place. I hope we can come back again and next time with better weather.

Motocross Illustrated: What did you do while you were here. I noticed you got a little sunburnt, so maybe the beach?

Cairoli: I am Italian, from the South, but I get burnt like a Norwegian guy. There wasn't that much sun, but I still get burnt. We went to some beaches, ate some nice local foods, and really had a good time here.

Motocross Illustrated: What will you do leading into Argentina?

Cairoli: We go back to Italy. Prepare a little, take a little rest, because two weeks travelling makes you a bit tired. We will train a little, and be ready for Argentina. I really like that track, and the South American fans are so happy to see us, so I look forward to seeing them also.

Motocross Illustrated: How is did you feel about the weekend in Qatar?

Cairoli: It was for sure a great weekend. I am happy, it's my 13th season in the world championship and happy to reach this goal. Not many riders have done it, and I have won a GP every year. The season started good with no injuries in the winter, so I could train better for the winter. I was looking forward to this GP. This week I was sick with flu and I took medication until Thursday, so I didn't know how my reaction would be during the racing, but I enjoyed the racing. The track was pretty good and technical, so I managed to make some good lines, in some places.

We saved some energy and I could push until the end of both motos. I am looking forward to the next one and we can have a good week of training. Even if we are not with the bike we can do physical training.

Motocross Illustrated: What about the second moto?

Cairoli: The first moto I had the holeshot and everything is easy when you have the holeshot, so that made it a little easier. I made a good rhythm and made a gap. The second moto was also a good start and I tried to get close to Tim, but we made contact at the start and I thought I had broken my spokes. I was thinking I broke some spokes, because I kept hearing some noise, but it was just a stone on the disc. I started making better lines, but Tim was riding well and got away. Near the end I found some better lines and was able to get him again. In the end I made the pass. It was a spectacular race and nice to race with Tim like this. I hope we have more races like this, because it's good for our sport.

Motocross Illustrated: How is your injury from last year?

Cairoli: My elbow (injury from 2016) is ok now. Actually it was a nerve, that gave me problems all last year, and I didn't have any feeling in my thumb, also less power than normal. I wasn't riding well on the bike. We did some tests with the shocks and the power and I feel good on the bike again.

Motocross Illustrated: Your first victory here. How does it feel?

Cairoli: The first time we came here I only won the super-final and Clement won the MXGP moto. It's a first time for me to win here. I hope it isn't the last time. It's a great facility and I hope we can come back.

Motocross Illustrated: What about the depth of this MXGP class?

Cairoli: This class is tough, maybe one of the toughest ever. We only had like 20 riders, but they were all good and that is great for the sport. We have all the GP winners. It's the most competitive class for a long time. We can mix up the season and the points and it's good to have so many good riders on the star grid.

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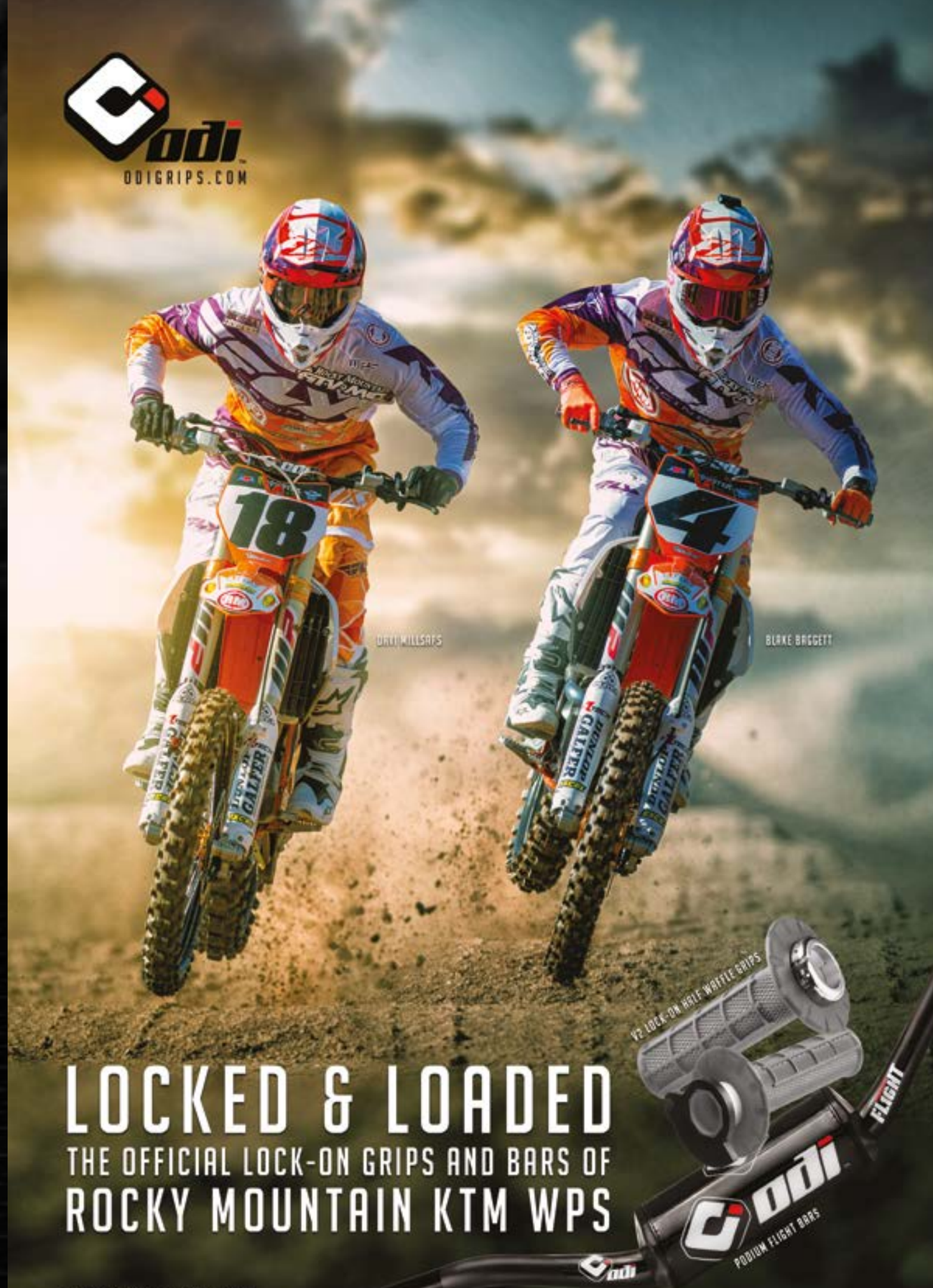

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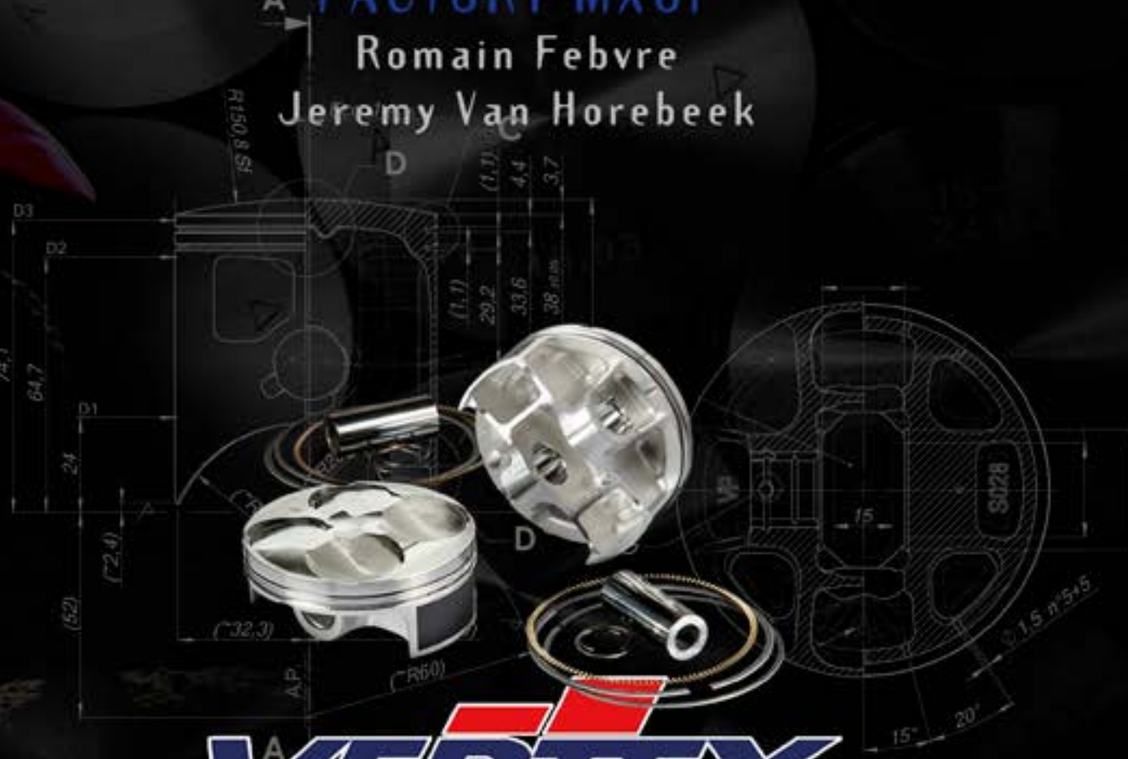

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EYES WIDE OPEN

Interview Geoff Meyer images Davey Coombs collection

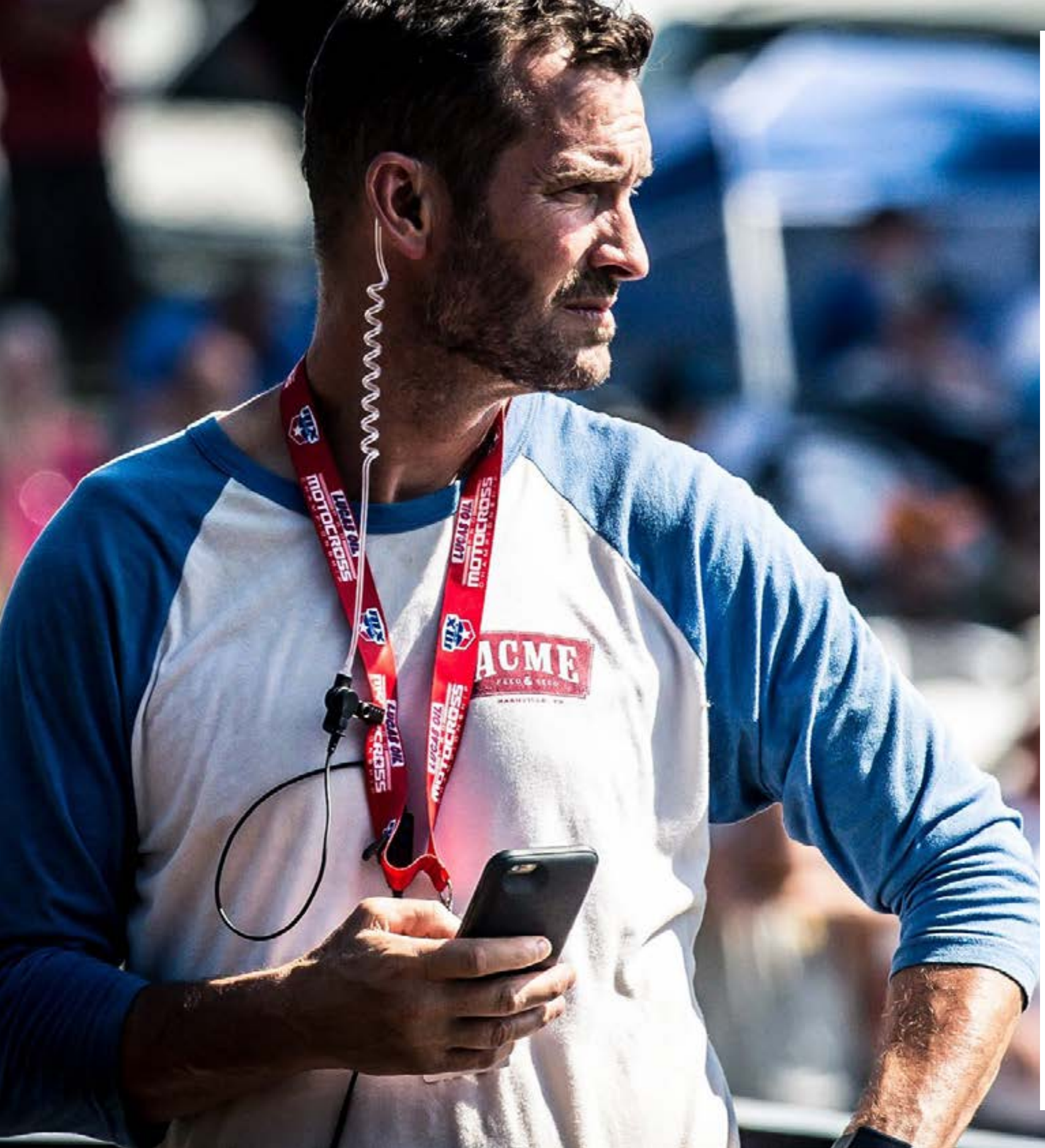
Yesterday we spoke to Giuseppe Luongo about this brilliant news that Youthstream and MXSports will work together in building the USGP back to what it used to be back in the 1970's and 1980s. Today we speak to Davey Coombs. Already it seems the 2017 USGP will be held at the Gatorback circuit in Florida, and the USGP sounds like it's going to RedBud. Great news for both events, and for sure we will see massive crowds return to the USGP.

Motocross Illustrated: Davey, thanks for taking my call, and congratulation on the new working relationship with Youthstream.

Coombs: Hey Geoff, no problem. I am just about to take David Luongo and Daniele Rizzi to a GNCC race. I am sorry I couldn't tell you more about what was happening, but as you can imagine, there was a lot of moving parts and a lot of things that needed to be worked out. I am very impressed with David and Daniele, and I am not sure when they came over, that they would leave with a USGP and a Motocross of Nations. We have had a wonderful visit from them.

Motocross Illustrated: I actually wanted to ask you about that, because I have met David a few times, and did an interview with him in Qatar, and he is a very impressive young man. How was the negotiations between yourself and him and Daniele?

Coombs: I have known Giuseppe for a long time, and you know, there was a time, back in 2007, that unbeknown to us, we got pitted against each other, when AMA was selling off AMA Pro Racing. Any time you get involved in something like that, it gets into a bidding way and a conflict. Message boards were coming along back then, and everyone in Europe had an opinion and everyone in America had an opinion, it just got messy. There was never really an opportunity to put the past behind us. Giuseppe tried other events, with other promoters and never walked with us, for whatever reason. Two days after the Maggiora MXoN last September, there was the news that Glen Helen wouldn't move forward, then Giuseppe called me out of the blue, I wasn't expecting to hear from him. Roger De Coster had mentioned that it would be a good idea, to have a USGP event in America and I think nobody wants three or four USGP, they want one. I think also we want to see the MXoN come back, because it's been nearly a decade since we had one. Rogers mentioned to Giuseppe that he should reach out to us and I am not sure Youthstream were even thinking they would come back to America. A lot has changed, a lot of water under the bridge, and I think we have both come to respect what the other is doing. Maybe now was the time to work together. Even as it was happening, Giuseppe was bringing David his son in, to make some decisions and get involved. So, he put him in charge of pulling this thing together. I hadn't



met him until this week, and I can tell you, he is an incredibly impressive individual, and I look forward to working with him for many years to come. Also, as you know Daniele came up through the press room, and he has a lot of experience and passion. I think they were also happy to see how we do things here and we exchanged a lot of notes. I think they are also excited for this thing to move forward.

Motocross Illustrated: Obviously, you have been a fan of Grand Prix motocross since you were a kid. I know when I talk to your friend Eric Johnson, he talks about being a child and seeing the Russian riders and all the other Europeans, and how exciting that was. How was it for you as a young boy going to a GP and promoting a GP. As a motocross historian, and a fan, how does it feel to be putting this into other events, like the AMA Nationals, the GNCC and the Loretta Lynn races.

Coombs: My first GP was 1975, Copetown, in Canada. It was a 500 GP and I remember seeing Roger DeCoster, Heikki Mikkola, Wolsink and those guys. A lot of people won't remember, but in 1986, when Giuseppe promoters his first race, the Maggiora Motocross des Nations, well one year later, me and my dad did the USGP at Steel City, a 125cc GP. Then we turned out attention to GNCC, LL, AMA Nationals and the GPs in America went to other places. America is a busy calendar and ever since the early 1990's it's hard to get a foothold for a Grand Prix. As you know we have a 17 round Supercross series, and then a 12 round AMA Nationals series. And it doesn't leave a lot of room. I think Glen Helen to their credit did their best, but it's hot in California in September. I know it was hard for a lot of people to get out there, and I give them credit, but it wasn't the right fit. Charlotte tried something different, but it didn't work out financially. When we started revising this thing, we said, look, we believe it need to be a traditional motocross facility, and it needs to be in the south east. We know a lot of our top riders are based in the south east, and it's a little easier to get them to do a race in their backyard, a week after the final Nationals. We found a place and I wish I could tell you now, we are a couple of weeks away from making it official. I think a lot of people will be happy to see the facility back on the calendar and they used to run an AMA National there back in the day. One thing that is important, the OEMs in America want to see an FIM event over here, but just one. Giuseppe and David, really want to see this happen and it is important to the GP series with so many US sponsors, like Monster Energy, Parts Unlimited, Fox Racing and so many more. We have a lot of good riders, who are well known for the AMA Supercross and AMA Motocross, but there are also a bunch of euro riders like Marvin Musquin, Kenny Roczen, Dylan Ferrandis, I think those guys would love to get out and do a GP. We have been working the phones with KTM, Husqvarna, Honda, and I truly believe we will see 40 riders per class and I believe it will be the cream of MXG

MX2 and the best American riders also involved and that is what we all want to see. That will make this event a success, not only for the promoter, Youthstream and MX-Sports, but for the sport in general.

Motocross Illustrated: Is this a big deal to do this for you?

Coombs: You know, it is a big deal. We have a long-term deal with the AMA, which was also part of the press conference yesterday. We have a long-term deal with AMA Pro Racing and we are not going anywhere. Youthstream also has long term deals and they take big risk going to places like Qatar and Indonesia, but America was a sort of fortress. We will still compete for sponsors, and for talent and we will still see the, our race is better than your race, and sometimes we will be right and sometimes they will be right, we can't touch places Matterley Basin and Maggiora, but we have RedBud and we have Unadilla, Mount Morris and we are proud of what we do as well. To bring everyone together for one race, after our series is run, and then you go back to Europe and end your championship, that sounds pretty perfect, because I think your series needs to end in Europe. I think you want to win your championship in front of your people. We will have this one race, and I hope it becomes like the Ryder Cup (USA vs Europe golf match up). I go one step further. We do Loretta Lynn's, and there is a very viable EMX series in Europe. How awesome would it be to have the 15 best schoolboys from America lining up on 125cc machine, against the likes of Zach Pichon, or Liam Everts and all those young kids you have over there. I think Youthstream would like to see that also. It would be great if it was one of the premier stops in FIM motocross and also shows what we can do over here. We all have a sense of pride and I think you will see the full arsenal of US promoters working at this event. They might not be promoting the event, but they will be there being involved.

Motocross Illustrated: We have been told it's Gatorback, which is obviously in Florida. Can you mentioned anything about that?

Coombs: We have mentioned, the race will be in the South East, and it will be an old National facility. We want it to be as easy as possible to have this race as close to a lot of the riders as possible. That is all I can say.

Motocross Illustrated: The thing you mentioned about the schoolboy riders. Would that be a back-up race for this year?

Coombs: We want this to happen in September of this year at the USGP. We would like the European schoolboys race it, but there will be a schoolboy's race with the best American schoolboys, no matter what. That will be a support race to the USGP, this year. We will have our best young talent there. All of Florida is like Lommel, everyone is based here. This will be a big local race for a lot of fast American kids and Youthstream would like that, because maybe some young American, or European kid will be discovered. We are in this together and we need to find all the best young riders for this event.

Motocross Illustrated: When is the announcement for the MXoN venue for next year, and will the USGP always be held at the same facility?

Coombs: That is up in the air. Wyn Kern is a very successful promot-

er. What many people don't know, is Gatorback has the second biggest race in America, with the Mini- Olympics. They pack that place, and it's as big as an outdoor Nationals. He wants to do it this year and Youthstream gave him a really good deal to do it, so he can make a profit right out of the gate. Next year, we don't know, but the negotiations are going so well, that when Giuseppe got word that the 2018 MXoN won't go ahead at it's original venue, and they prefer to run it in 2019, he asked me if I wanted to do it, and I told him, we have our premier facility and we believe they will be ready in 2018. David (Luongo) did mention it's happening, but didn't mention where. I bet you will be there Geoff, it's probably a track you always wanted to go to.

Motocross Illustrated: Well I always wanted to go to Washougal, I don't think it will be there, but there are many American tracks, like RedBud.

Coombs: That is a great suggestion, I would say that is at the top of the list, how is that.

Motocross Illustrated: This seems to have really cleaned up a lot of the mess between Europe and USA, hasn't it?

Coombs: There will always be a friendly rivalry, that is what we do, that is how we make our events better. I think there will be a very helpful partnership. We want Youthstream to have successful races, and we want to show what we can do. Maybe one day we would love to have the FIM Junior World Cup. My sister runs the GNCC and he husband Jeff, want to host the ISDE one day and the way to do that is start working with the FIM. The way to do that is via the front door with Youthstream. We will do one GP a year on Labour day weekend, and I think it will work for everyone. Right now, that promoter is already hard at work for this year's USGP.

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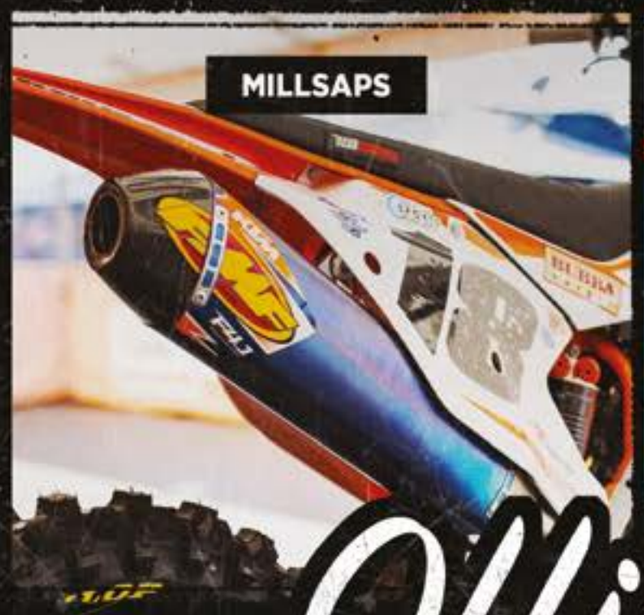

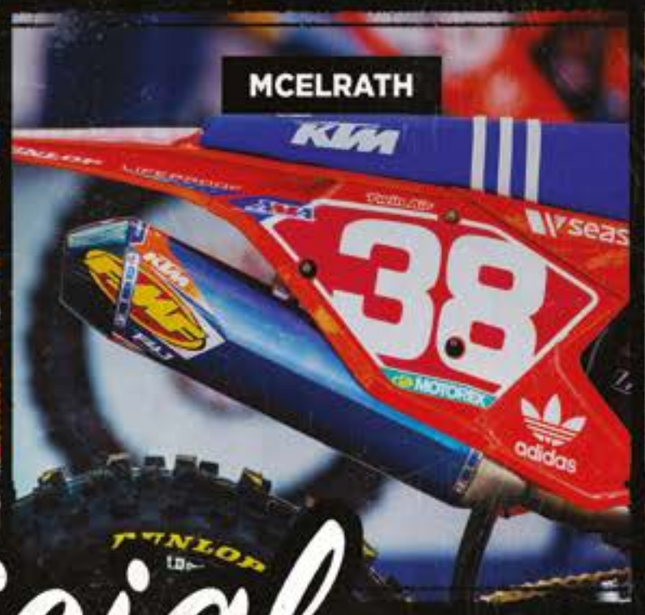

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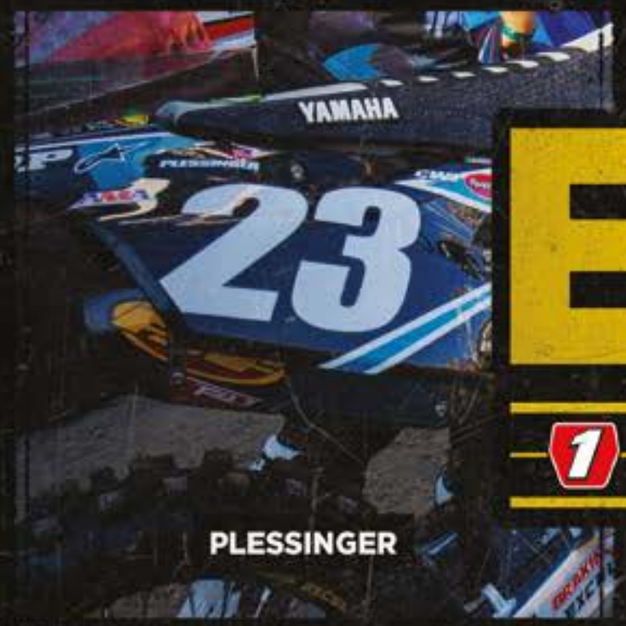

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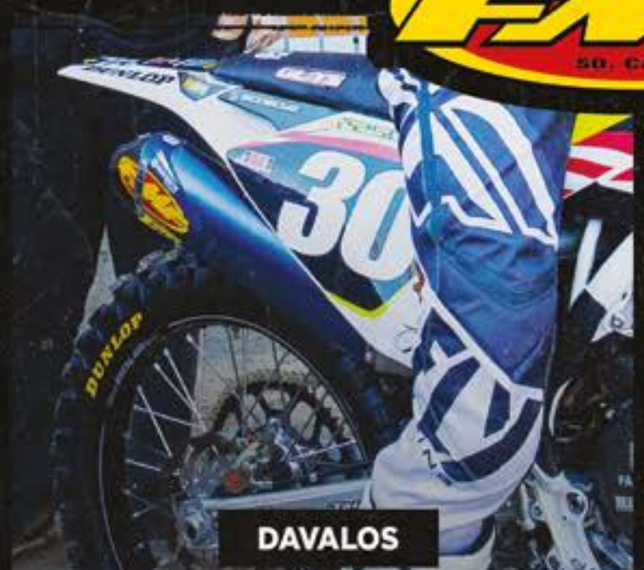

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